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ABSTRACT

This paper provides information about creating Professional Development Schools (PDSs) linked with university teacher preparation programs. It focuses on PDS programs in three regions of the United States at very diverse institutions, noting what has been learned from their experiences. All of the PDS partnerships in Towson University, Maryland's College of Education are reciprocal and based on mutual respect between partners. In 2000, a unique partnership began when Towson University Department of Early Childhood Education faculty and faculty from the Infant-Primary Special Education Department started discussions among themselves (and then with Baltimore County Public School personnel) about planning a joint PDS effort to enrich the professional preparation of teacher candidates in their respective areas. The Western Maine Site is one of five partnership sites for the Extended Teacher Education Program at the University of Southern Maine. The site accepted its first cohort of interns in 1993. This program emphasizes education as community service. Gonzaga University, Washington's, School of Education offers certification in general and special education at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Its PDS partnerships with the local schools have been rocky because of faculty turnover, which served to derail the PDS relationships. However, once the university developed relationships with the new faculty, the collaborations became effective again. (SM)

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JOINING TOGETHER TO PREPARE TEACHERS: DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS

The purpose of this paper is to provide information about developing professional development schools (PDS) linked with university teacher preparation programs. In this paper we will provide information on the PDS programs used in three regions of the country at very different institutions and what we have learned from these experiences as we work to develop the most effective programs possible for our teacher candidates.

Research base

There is a rich research base to support the concept of professional development schools, the benefits to both partners, the positive effects on teacher candidates' preparation, and best practices in the creation of these partnerships. The advent of the professional development school (PDS) was prompted by teacher educators and professionals in k-12 schools exercising leadership to improve the preparation and retention of beginning teachers. The goal of the PDS initiative was for university and school faculties collaboratively a) to provide preservice students extended immersion experiences im model k-12 settings, b) to provide k-12 staff access to professional development resources through the university, and c) to promote research and inquiry. Such a partnership couched in a culture of continuous improvement offered the promise of simultaneous renewal and enhanced learning opportunities for all concerned, including the diverse K-12 student body of our public schools (Goodlad, 1994).

The agenda of simultaneous renewal is concordant with the needs of rural settings. Rural schools often have a high proportion of experienced staff but may have difficulty recruiting and retaining new teachers, many of whom have had limited preparation for the cultural contexts within which they find themselves (Prater, Miller, & Minner, 1997). Often a high percentage of new hires in PDS districts/schools are graduates of the PDS program. Many administrators prefer PDS candidates because they've already proven themselves and are socialized to the context of the district (Ridlon & Major, 1997). Rural site-based programs may rely heavily on recruits from within a district, also. Such graduates are less likely to relocate to obtain a position (Westling & Whitten, 1996). Thus, the PDS is a means of 'growing your own' new faculty with full credentials. Another goal of a PDS is to reduce the isolation of practicing teachers, a common dilemma of educators in rural or remote locations. The PDS may address this dilemma for the district by promoting professional growth, dialogue, and communities of practice (Boudah & Knight, 1999).

However, establishing and sustaining a healthy PDS in a rural site has its own inherent challenges and requires coherent, consistent leadership at many levels. Frances Cochran (1999) has observed that PDS's are being created and maintained through the work of individuals rather than as part of an overall well developed organizational plan. Her interpretation of survey data from 75 individuals in 50 institutions suggests that individual professionals are forming the relationships needed as a basis for collaboration and are doing the work defined by the PDS as important. However, it is her perception that professionals are doing this work despite a lack of support and systemic change within their educational institutions. Participants in Cochran's survey perceived the greatest advantage to the work is improved teacher education (41%) followed by building a collaborative community (16%), continuing education (14%), and providing students an exemplary education (13%).

Surveys conducted in our own site (Ridlon & Major, 1997) are consistent with her findings. However, one might wonder if the relationships that are formed and sustained through the PDS contribute a value added 13% to student learning, is that a worthwhile investment? Further, perhaps the flexible, complimentary nature of the partnership between schools and universities is a positive feature. When program structures become too institutionalized they can be rigid. Our goal as teacher educators should be to garner consistent institutional support but maintain a reciprocal balance. "Just as we are inventing this new institution, so too leadership for and in the PDS needs to be invented. Sorting out the matter of leadership is part of the task of invention. (Mager, 1999, p. 198)

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The model used at Towson University

In 1995 and 1996, the faculty in the Department of Early Childhood Education began the first professional development school (PDS) partnership designed to enhance the professional preparation of initial certification teacher candidates at the undergraduate level. This first partnership (that continues to exist) is in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. All of the PDS partnerships in Towson's College of Education are reciprocal in nature and based upon mutual respect between partners and how each partner can do all that is necessary to meet the needs of 1) the students enrolled in the schools in which the partnerships are located, 2) partner school teachers, staff, and administrators, 3) the teacher candidates, and, 4) the faculty and staff in the four departments in Towson University's College of Education. In Early Childhood Education as of this time, there are five PDS projects in four county school districts encompassing 14 schools. These projects are located in urban, suburban, and quasi-rural areas. "Quasi-rural" in that some of the schools are in the rural places of two of the counties in which PDS projects are located. To be clear, these five projects associated with Towson's Department of Early Childhood Education. As of January, 2003, Towson has 45 PDS partnerships in seven county school districts and one city school district encompassing 76 different schools in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Special Education, and Secondary Education.

In 2000, a unique partnership began when faculty in Towson University's Department of Early Childhood Education and faculty from the Infant-Primary Special Education started discussions among themselves (and, then, with Baltimore County Public School personnel) on planning a joint professional development school (PDS) effort aimed at enriching the professional preparation of teacher candidates engaged in initial certification programs in their respective areas. In addition, through this collaboration, increased opportunities to work in schools with practicing teachers, staff, and administrators while providing school personnel with multiple-faceted professional development opportunities was a necessity in order to continue the extensive PDS efforts Towson's College of Education had undertaken since 1995 as part of its own philosophical approach to teacher preparation, to meet the intent of Maryland's 1995-96 "Redesign of Teacher Education," and to meet the 1997 State Board of Education requirement that all teachers being trained in Maryland's colleges and universities receive their training in professional development schools/academies by 2004. At present, this is an unfunded state mandate. Combining early childhood education and special education was seen to have considerable advantages that might lead to a collaborative major with students from each program knowing more about all children and the families of all children ranging in age from birth through eight years.

Of interest, then, to the Baltimore County Public Schools, the administrators, teachers, and staff at the three schools, and the university faculty would be environments in which candidates seeking initial certification could be recruited to work in schools representing these characteristics (after having spent three semesters of their training engaged as full members of those school communities). The realism of this training, then, would result in the increased retention of new teachers who were trained through this PDS partnership and hired by these schools when vacancies occurred, or in similar schools, many of which predominate Baltimore County and other school districts in central Maryland whether they be urban, suburban, or rural in nature. In addition, this project along with a PDS project in two proximal schools in the Baltimore City Public Schools (and proximal to the Baltimore County project) themselves having 100% African-American populations of children could serve as the means by which African-American university students could be recruited to the programs in Early Childhood Education and Infant-Primary Special Education.

The Maine Extended Teacher Education Program

The Western Maine Site is one of five partnership sites for the ETEP (Extended Teacher Education Program) at the University of Southern Maine. ETEP is a thirty three credit site-based graduate teacher certification program which has earned a strong national reputation since it's inception in 1989 . Admission to the program is contingent upon a successful interview at a site by a team of mentor teachers, administrators, and university faculty. In recent years admission rates for candidates with complete applications have ranged from 60-75%. A cohort of 15-20 interns concurrently participate in coursework and school-based internships in each site from August through mid-May. Interns who successfully complete the program are eligible for initial teacher certification and may complete a master's degree by taking thirteen additional credits of coursework during their first or second year of teaching.

A pair of faculty (a university-based site coordinator and a school-based site coordinator) oversee all programming, supervision, and communications within each site. They fulfill crucial leadership roles as they set the agenda for the site's steering committee and are the primary communicators of the program's "vision" among stakeholders.

The Western Maine Site accepted the first cohort of interns in 1993 after more than a year of collaborative site development activity led by a university faculty member and an elementary principal. The university faculty member who initiated the partnership had extensive expertise in supervision, and took the lead in offering graduate courses onsite on clinical supervision and mentoring. Many teachers who participated in those first courses have continued to contribute to the growth and sustenance of the site through mentoring and varied leadership roles. The principal, who was highly regarded by university faculty and administrators for supporting innovative practices in his school, took the lead in organizing a k-12 curriculum alignment project. These influences are reflected in the vision that stakeholders agreed on for the site. It had five areas of emphasis: 1) preservice and continuing teacher education, 2) coherent and coordinated education - the k-12 focus, 3) belonging- the community spirit focus, 4) continuing professional development - the self evaluation and professional improvement focus, and 5) skilled service - The education as community service focus (Fryeburg ETEP Handbook, 1998).

The emphasis on community was fitting for the rural nature of the site. The sponsoring school district, MSAD #72, is a consolidated district which includes seven towns in Maine and two towns in New Hampshire which choose to tuition their students. During the first few years of the site, it was more difficult to garner financial support from the K-8 public school administration to help fund a school-based site coordinator position despite the fact that strong relationships among the K-8 staff and university program were the primary driving force for the partnerhship. Eventually, limited support for the site coordinator's salary was committed via a grant for the k-12 curricular initiative that was underway. This was fortuitous as through the curriculum initiative a new collaborative, teacher-led organizational structure for educational restructuring was developed. Known as ARISE, it is now the vehicle for organizing and integrating professional development and school improvement efforts within each school and throughout the district as a whole. ARISE committees are usually teacher led and allow for continuous improvement in curriculum and assessment protocols throughout the k-8 classrooms in the district. The district tapped into resources at the university throughout the development process. Because of the relationships among individuals, there was a strong sense of association between ETEP and ARISE.

The Gonzaga University experience

Gonzaga University is a small, private, Jesuit institution located in Spokane, Washington. The School of Education offers certification programs in general and special education at both undergraduate and graduate levels. There are three other colleges offering teacher education programs in Spokane and we all compete for the best field placements in the local schools. We have found several reasons for developing PDS sites, including 1) the research base which shows how effective these programs are for our teacher candidates; 2) the need to establish long-term relationships with the schools and classrooms in which we want to place our teacher candidates so that we can count on being able to use those sites year after year; and 3) the benefits we have gained from the collaborative relationship with these highly effective teachers.

Our experience with these partnerships has been a rocky one. We began this work in an earnest way nine years ago by identifying one school at each level with whom we felt we could work effectively and designated a faculty member to foster the relationship. This effort went well until we had several faculty retirements and changes in principals; these changes derailed our partnerships for awhile. Once we established new relationships between the key players we began to work together effectively once again. At this point we have active partnerships with two elementary schools, one high school, and are working with two middle schools, but in less formal ways. We have also formed a partnership with another elementary school, but find it is not truly a PDS site for a variety of reasons. We have a faculty committee focused on developing and sustaining partnerships and have designated one colleague as the official contact for that work.

What we have learned

The process of establishing a PDS partnership requires anywhere from 6 months to two years of effort. This includes: a) university planning; b) informal discussions with school principals and district personnel; c) gaining entrée and formal approval from the local school district and the proposed partner schools; d) extensive strategic planning to discuss the characteristics of the schools, the university program, the fit of the PDS project to the university program and school improvement efforts; e) discussing roles and responsibilities in all matters from governance to mentoring to determining and providing professional development opportunities, including the conduct of inquiry and action research; and, f) reviewing state PDS Standards as well as NCATE PDS Standards and determining the process of on-going review and evaluation.

Central to the success of the PDS project is leadership, administrative support, investment of partners, and fiscal support, when available, that is used as incentives for what is labor-intensive effort. The following characteristics are necessary for PDS success: 1) belief that PDS has benefits for all stakeholders, including the students enrolled in partner schools; 2) investment by school personnel and university faculty and staff that effective professional preparation and professional development can occur via the PDS; 3) on-going and strong leadership of principals and university department heads and the dean for PDS; 4) establishing, implementing, evaluating, and revising PDS projects takes time, considerable amounts of time; 5) state standards that are developmental in nature recognizing that PDS are constantly being revised due to annual changes in school faculty, new principals being assigned to schools, and that PDS projects by their very nature are complex; 6) the need to find incentives for school personnel to be an on-going part of the PDS efforts as this work is typically beyond what is required, especially during times of great pressure brought about by high stakes testing, the introduction of new district programs and curricula, and other new initiatives; and, 7) the knowledge that during the present time economic incentives and supports for PDS work take a second place behind "No Child Left behind" and other state initiatives.

As with so many accomplishments in a school site, it is difficult to sort cause and effect from contribution. As Mager (1999) has pointed out, it's important to keep one's perspective. The work has institutional and individual dimensions. Both can be influenced by PDS involvement in important ways. "When the school changes so do the work lives of the educators involved. And the changing lives of these educators are changing the institution." (p. 193) Maintaining the vision, adjusting the vision over time, and accommodating transitions in staffing patterns are ongoing challenges. Naturally, as the leadership positions change, the vision for the program shifts. Many of the changes have been determined at the university level in response to pressures to standardize requirements for interns across sites and to achieve more economy of scale.

Conclusions

Among the questions remaining happens to be: Does the PDS work? In our view, there is no better way to do what we do than being involved in PDS for the most effective training of teachers, assisting in the professional development of practicing professionals, becoming "true" partners with the school and the community, and being more intimately involved with children and in their learning. We believe in the PDS as the principle means of training teachers, in working with school professionals as a resource of the first resort, and, importantly, for enhancing the creditability of university personnel in schools and in the community. And, of the greatest significance, there is a genuine greater closeness with children which is why we are doing all of this in the first place.

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